

VZCZCXRO2062  
OO RUEHCI  
DE RUEHKA #1885/01 3371254  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 031254Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5710  
INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9405  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1043  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0334  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2619  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8199  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8294  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1928  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0420  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0601  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0051  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [AMGT](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#)  
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SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA Cyclone Sidr Situation Report #9: Shelter and Livelihoods: Thoughts from the Field

1. The USAID'S Disaster Assistance Response Team's (USAID/DART) shelter and livelihoods advisor recently completed a three-day assessment in the cyclone-affected districts of Bagerhat and Pirojpur. These two districts, along with Borguna and Paktuakhali, are among the districts hardest hit by Cyclone Sidr. The assessment focused on the status of current relief activities, the evolving shelter and livelihoods needs of cyclone-affected populations, the coordination of relief actors on the ground, and the ground-truthing of reports that there are still large areas yet to receive relief assistance.

2. Nearly three weeks following the landfall of Sidr, interviewed families still identify shelter, cash, livelihoods support and food as their most urgent needs. These identified needs are consistent with findings from previous DART assessments.

3. The USAID/DART's shelter and livelihoods advisor found that, within the assessed areas, there were pockets of severe damage caused by high winds and falling trees. The tidal surge that affected the southern parts of Barguna and Paktuakhali districts did not significantly affect Bagerhat and Pirojpur. The geographic location of these districts allowed the Sundarbans, a massive mangrove swamp, to absorb the brunt of Sidr's strength. Damage to these areas, while significant, would have been much greater had not the Sundarbans effectively buffeted Sidr's high winds and tidal surge.

4. Current relief interventions are undertaken by a variety of

actors. There are significant numbers of grassroots organizations and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh that are integrally involved in the delivery of relief commodities. These commodities include household items, clothes, and food. These ad-hoc activities often go unnoticed as they take place informally and oftentimes outside the reach of national level coordination efforts. These activities are small when considered in isolation. However, when they are viewed in aggregate, they provide extensive coverage of the cyclone-affected area.

15. While the U.N. cluster system is attempting to coordinate relief activities at the national level, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) military is coordinating relief activities at the local upazilla level. Local government officials report that this coordination is proving effective. The coordination of these informal, ad-hoc relief activities significantly reduces the potential for un-served areas existing within the cyclone-affected area. Some NGOs reported that there are still large geographic areas yet to receive relief assistance. The USAID/DART Livelihoods and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Advisors visited all of these reportedly un-served areas. In all cases, relief assistance was being provided. Effective coordination at the local level is one of the primary reasons why.

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PRIORITY NEEDS: SHELTER  
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16. Cyclone-affected families overwhelmingly identify shelter as one of their most urgent needs. World Vision estimates that more than 200,000 shelters have been damaged or destroyed within Bagerhat and Pirojpur districts. Emergency shelter interventions by World Vision and other organizations are focused on the distribution of timbers,

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CI sheeting, and tools. This shelter kit is thought to provide the basic inputs a family needs in order to meet their acute emergency shelter need.

17. Field assessments indicate that, in many places, families have salvaged materials from their previous houses and are preparing for rebuilding. Families have constructed makeshift shelters from salvaged materials and are residing on their plots of land in these temporary structures until their houses are rebuilt.

18. In interviews with affected populations, many respondents have stated that they cannot rebuild their houses because they do not possess the technical know-how. Housing construction throughout the cyclone-affected area is widely undertaken by skilled laborers that are hired by the home owners. The hiring of skilled labor for the construction of a modest house is estimated to be 14,000 taka (\$200). Many cyclone-affected families do not have the necessary cash to pay the skilled labor to build their houses. Without access to additional income, shelter reconstruction activities could stymie thereby prolonging the recovery period.

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PRIORITY NEEDS: CASH  
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19. Livelihoods throughout the cyclone-affected area have been interrupted. Farmers, fishermen, and small traders have been hit especially hard. This interruption to livelihoods has severely reduced people's access to cash. Cash is incredibly important to people's overall recovery efforts. Without it, shelter reconstruction efforts are limited (see above note), access to food is curtailed thereby increasing food insecurity, needed drugs and medicines cannot be procured, and livelihoods assets (boats, nets, fisheries, seeds, tools) cannot be repaired or restored.

110. The GOB estimates that nearly 382,000 livestock animals were lost. For many people in the affected region, livestock serves as the place where wealth is stored. The loss of livestock is particularly devastating for poor families. Cows not only serve as wealth storage but also contribute to income generation through the selling of milk. The USAID/OFDA Shelter and Livelihoods Advisor

spent time in cattle bazaars in the affected region. Prior to the Cyclone Sidr, the average price for a cow was an estimated 10,000 taka. Following the cyclone, the price has fallen to 6,000 taka. The reduction in price is due primarily to families liquidating household assets in effort to obtain cash to rebuild their houses.

¶11. The GOB has developed a compensation plan whereby a family with a damaged house is to receive 3000 taka, a family with a destroyed house is to receive 5000 taka, and a family who had a member die is to receive 10,000 taka. This approach was thought to provide a much needed cash-infusion into the affected areas. Pirojpur District has already distributed 64.5 million taka (\$950,000) as part of this compensation plan. However, interviews with particularly vulnerable families in the affected region reveal that they have yet to receive any compensation from the GOB. It is unclear whether the GOB compensation plan will target the most needy families or will be used as a political tool by local politicians to support their political parties. More time is needed to gauge the effectiveness of this program.

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¶12. The need for cash throughout the affected region is pronounced. Given that markets in the area are still functioning and well-integrated with the rest of the country signifies that a large-scale cash infusion is viable. The World Bank is planning an assessment of the affected region in the coming weeks which will inform the design of its longer-term recovery program. The Bank is considering implementing a large-scale cash distribution to the most needy families. This program will provide a much needed cash complement to the relief assistance package that has been given to date.

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PRIORITY NEED: LIVELIHOODS, INCLUDING FOOD  
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¶13. Interviews with affected populations reveal that farming, fishing, and small trading were livelihoods that have been severely disrupted by the cyclone. The loss of productive assets (boats, nets, seed inputs, related equipment) prevents livelihoods from resuming in the near future without external assistance. Immediate assistance should focus on the restoration of these productive assets either through direct distribution (of seeds and tools) or through programs aimed to increase purchasing power thereby enabling people to procure or repair assets (such as boats and nets) themselves.

¶14. The extent of crop damage throughout the affected region is yet to be determined. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is planning a crop assessment in the coming days that will determine the amount of crop loss and provide a clearer picture of overall crop loss. Currently, crop loss estimates range from 30 to 85 percent.

¶15. In order to support farmers, the very timely distribution of agricultural inputs (seeds, tools, and fertilizer) may be needed. The need for this intervention will be determined by actual crop loss. If crop losses are low, interruption to farming livelihoods may not be severe and the need for the distribution of agricultural inputs may be eliminated.

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
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¶16. While emergency shelter assistance is needed throughout the cyclone-affected region, the USAID/DART Shelter and Livelihoods Advisor recommends that the bulk of USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) shelter assistance should focus on supporting early recovery transitional shelter activities. The U.N.-sponsored shelter cluster is currently working on a design for a transitional shelter which can help standardize shelter assistance across the affected region. The USAID/DART shelter and livelihoods advisor is integrally involved in supporting the development and

timely distribution of this shelter design. It is expected to be distributed within the next six days.

¶17. The USAID/DART shelter and livelihoods advisor recommends that USAID/OFDA-funded shelter programs focus on meeting both the emergency need for shelter and the early recovery need for transitional housing. Emergency shelter activities should include

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the distribution of shelter kits (CI sheeting, timber, tools) and focus on providing shelter prior to the onset of the Bangladesh winter (late December). Transitional shelter activities (training, public outreach in build back better messages, and distribution of more robust housing inputs) should focus on providing early recovery assistance prior to the onset of the rainy season (June).

¶18. With regard to cash, the USAID/DART shelter and livelihoods advisor recommends that early recovery activities focus on creating income generating opportunities. Cash-for-work (CFW) activities targeting road rehabilitation, removal of debris from public places, pond clearing, and the rehabilitation of flood protection walls are all viable activities. In general CFW activities should focus on the rehabilitation of public property goods and not on private property items such as paying people to plant crops or to build their homes. A second recommendation is to work in close coordination with the World Bank to determine the type of long-term assistance program it is planning. If the Bank plans large-scale cash distributions, USAID/OFDA may need to rethink CFW activities as cash distribution tends to undermine CFW if carried out within the same geographic area.

¶19. Where cyclone-affected livelihoods have been interrupted, USAID/OFDA recommends focusing early recovery assistance on the restoration of productive assets. This will include seeds and tools distribution (or seed fairs) for farmers. Livelihoods support should also include activities aimed to increase purchasing power. Through creating income generating activities, people will be able to replace or repair damaged livelihoods assets (such as boats, nets, tools, and rickshaws) themselves.

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